WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

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1. An image management and search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to
5 said image data, said image management and search apparatus comprising:

input means for inputting search terms;

storage means storing said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;

10 search means for searching said storage means for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input means; and

rearranging means for rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search
15 means according to said importance.

2. An image management and search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein when said rearranging means rearranges the images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means according to said
20 importance, said rearranging means regards standard importance of a default as priority in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and said rearranging means regards said importance as priority in a case where said importance is stored in said storage
25 means, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

3. An image management and search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said image management and search apparatus comprising:

5 input means for inputting search terms;

storage means storing said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;

search means for searching said storage means for keywords corresponding to images to be searched or
10 keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input means; and

rearranging means for rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search
15 means according to said importance and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords.

4. An image management and search apparatus according to claim 3, wherein when said rearranging means rearranges the images corresponding to the keywords
20 searched by said search means according to said importance and said closeness in meaning, said rearranging means calculates priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with no importance in a preset priority formula matrix in a case
25 where said importance is not stored in said storage means; and said rearranging means calculates priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a

line with relevant importance in said priority formula matrix in a case where said importance is stored in said storage means, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

5. An image management and search apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said priority formula matrix is constructed in a manner such that said importance and said accordance are arranged correspondingly to one other in a form of a matrix, said rearranging means regarding said importance plus said accordance as priority if said accordance is not less than a predetermined threshold level, and regarding said accordance as priority if said accordance is less than said threshold level.

6. An image management and search apparatus according to any of claims 1 through 5, wherein said image management and search apparatus is provided in a server of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said input means receiving search terms inputted by a client of said information retrieval system on the Internet, said search means searching said storage means for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms, said rearranging means rearranging images corresponding to keywords searched by said search means according to said importance, and said image management and search

apparatus returning the rearranged images in a
predetermined format such as HTML and XML to said client.

7. An image management and search method applied to
an image management and search apparatus, which searches

5 image data according to keywords assigned to said image
data, said image management and search method comprising:

an input step of inputting search terms;

a storage controlling step of storing, in storage
means, said keywords assigned to said image data

10 correspondingly to importance;

a searching step of searching said storage means for
keywords corresponding to images to be searched according
to the search terms inputted by said input steps; and

a rearranging step of rearranging images

15 corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching
step according to said importance.

8. An image management and search method according
to claim 7, wherein when the images corresponding to the
keywords searched by said search means are rearranged

20 according to said importance, said rearranging step
comprises regarding standard importance of a default as
priority in a case where said importance is not stored in
said storage means, and regarding said importance as
priority in a case where said importance is stored in

25 said storage means, degree of said importance being
determined according to whether or not the searched
keywords represent subjects of images.

9. An image management and search method applied to an image management and search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said image management and search method comprising:

an input step of inputting search terms;

a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;

a searching step of searching said storage means for keywords corresponding to said images to be searched or keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input step; and

a rearranging step of rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step according to said importance and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords.

10. An image management and search method according to claim 9, wherein when the images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step are rearranged according to said importance and said closeness in meaning, said rearranging step comprises calculating priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with no importance in a preset priority formula matrix in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and calculating priority with reference to a relevant column of

accordance in a line with relevant importance in said priority formula matrix in a case where said importance is stored in said storage means, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

11. An image management and search method according to claim 10, wherein said priority formula matrix is constructed in a manner such that said importance and said accordance are arranged correspondingly to one other in a form of a matrix, said rearranging step comprising regarding said importance plus said accordance as priority if said accordance is not less than a predetermined threshold level, and regarding said accordance as priority if said accordance is less than said threshold level.

12. An image management and search method according to any of claims 7 through 11, wherein said input step comprises receiving search terms inputted by a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said searching step comprising searching said storage means for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms, said rearranging step comprising rearranging images corresponding to keywords searched by said searching step according to said importance, and the rearranged images being returned in a predetermined format such as HTML and XML to said client.

13. A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image management and search method applied to an image management and search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said image

5 management and search method comprising:

an input step of inputting search terms;

a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, said keywords assigned to said image data

10 correspondingly to importance;

a searching step of searching said storage means for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input step; and

a rearranging step of rearranging images

15 corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step according to said importance.

14. A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein when the images corresponding to the keywords searched by said search means are rearranged according to said

20 importance, said rearranging step comprises regarding standard importance of a default as priority in a case where said importance is not stored in said storage means, and regarding said importance as priority in a case where said importance is stored in said storage

25 means, degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

15. A storage medium that can be read by a computer and stores a program for executing an image management and search method applied to an image management and search apparatus, which searches image data according to keywords assigned to said image data, said image management and search method comprising:

an input step of inputting search terms;

a storage controlling step of storing, in storage means, said keywords assigned to said image data correspondingly to importance;

a searching step of searching said storage means for keywords corresponding to images to be searched or keywords closely related in meaning to said images to be searched according to the search terms inputted by said input step; and

a rearranging step of rearranging images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step according to said importance and closeness in meaning of said closely related keywords.

16. A storage medium according to claim 15, wherein when the images corresponding to the keywords searched by said searching step are rearranged according to said importance and said closeness in meaning, said rearranging step comprises calculating priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with no importance in a preset priority formula matrix in a case where said importance is not stored in said

storage means, and calculating priority with reference to a relevant column of accordance in a line with relevant importance in said priority formula matrix in a case where said importance is stored in said storage means,

5 degree of said importance being determined according to whether or not the searched keywords represent subjects of images.

17. A storage medium according to claim 16, wherein said priority formula matrix is constructed in a manner

10 such that said importance and said accordance are arranged correspondingly to one other in a form of a matrix, said rearranging step comprising regarding said importance plus said accordance as priority if said accordance is not less than a predetermined threshold

15 level, and regarding said accordance as priority if said accordance is less than said threshold level.

18. A storage medium according to any of claims 13 through 17, wherein said input step comprises receiving search terms inputted by a client of an information

20 retrieval system on the Internet, said searching step comprising searching said storage means for keywords corresponding to images to be searched according to the received search terms, said rearranging step comprising rearranging images corresponding to keywords searched by

25 said searching step according to said importance, and the rearranged images being returned in a predetermined format such as HTML and XML to said client.